DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 446 683 HE 033 536

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TITLE	New Faculty's Perceptions of the Academic Work Life. ASHE Annual Meeting Paper.
PUB DATE	2000-11-16
NOTE	21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) (Sacramento, CA, November 16-19, 2000).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Beginning Teachers; *College Faculty; Higher Education; Professional Development; Qualitative Research; Socialization; *Teacher Attitudes; *Work Experience

ABSTRACT

To better understand the perceptions of new faculty regarding the professional socialization process, a qualitative study of faculty socialization was conducted at a comprehensive state-supported university. Fourteen faculty members hired within the last 3 years, whether inexperienced, experienced, or returning (those who had worked in another field before changing careers) were interviewed. One problem faced by these new faculty members was a sense of isolation that made these new teachers think that the problems they were experiencing were unique. Faculty from all three categories expressed surprise at the amount of time spent preparing for class, and most wished that they had more time for scholarship or research. Of the 14 respondents, 6 thought that they understood the requirements for tenure, and 8 thought that the requirements for gaining tenure were unclear. Most of the respondents felt that the pressures were greater for teaching than for publishing, but most seemed to overwhelmed to think about future scholarly endeavors. When asked about the greatest disappointment they had experienced since taking the position, many cited the labor-management conflicts the campus was experiencing. (Contains 26 references.) (SLD)

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ED 446 683

New Faculty's Perceptions of the Academic Work Life

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New Faculty's Perceptions of the Academic Work Life

Paper presented at

The Association for the Study of Higher Education

November 16, 2000

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New Faculty's Perceptions of the Academic Work Life

The philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, used the heuristic device of a state of nature to describe how individuals might live if there were no recognized authority to govern. He described the state of nature as a state "wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them." He went on to say that in such a state there are "no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (Leviathan, pt. 1, ch. 13). New faculty members adjustment to university life bears a strange similarity to a Hobbesian state of nature. Even a cursory review of the literature reveals adjustment to academic life is often traumatic and demoralizing (Dunn, Rouse & Seff, 1994; Menges, 1996, Menges & Associates, 1999; Olsen & Sorcinelli, 1992; Reynolds, 1992; Sorcinelli, 1992; Sorcinelli & Austin, 1992; Turner & Boice, 1989; Whitt, 1991).

Boice (1992), for example, reports that new faculty describe their initiation period as a time of "avoidance, distress, and unproductive beginning" (p. 3). He adds that the situation new faculty find themselves in "quietly favors social Darwinism as the mechanism for dealing with new faculty. Professors with the right stuff and right connections survive; those without it are presumably better off elsewhere" (p. 8). Menges (1996) describes the climate most new faculty experience.

> First, anxiety is high for junior faculty. This is no longer anxiety about finding a job; it has now become anxiety about surviving in the job. Second, junior faculty feel tremendous pressure from obligations that compete for their time and energy. . . . Third, junior faculty report a sense of isolation, finding fewer connections

> with colleagues than they expected to have and than they would like to have. Fourth, stress from professional matters overflows into non-work areas, creating tension in families and other personal relationships. Finally, new and junior faculty experience dissonance about the rewards they receive for their work. (p. 170)

A new faculty member represents a substantial investment for a university and the loss of that person is a waste of valuable resources. More importantly the trauma to the new faculty member who fails to achieve tenure can set a pattern affecting his or her entire academic career (Baldwin, 1979). Of course, the first step for insuring the success of a new faculty member is making the correct hiring decision. However, recruiting and hiring the best faculty members will come to naught if they are not retained.

To retain faculty members universities need to pay attention to how new faculty members are socialized into the organization. Organizational theorists using career stage theories have consistently demonstrated that there is a strong correlation between organizational support during the career entry stage and the willingness of novice employees to remain with the institution and the career (Aryee, Chay, & Chew, 1994). "The implication for organizations is that the job context should be perceived as an integral part of career development opportunities" (p. 14). By understanding what environmental experiences are pivotal in shaping new faculty members' views, we can create programs that will assist them to have successful careers. In order to better understand the perceptions of new faculty regarding the socialization process, a qualitative study of faculty socialization at a comprehensive state-supported university was conducted.

Since much of the literature suggests that a new faculty member's failure to thrive appears to be due to unmet expectations (Chatman, 1981; Feldman, 1981; Gaff & Lambert, 1996; Meyers et al., 1998; Olsen & Crawford, 1998), the research reported here is based on the theory of met expectations developed by Porter and Steers (1973). Researchers have argued that the "met expectations" theory best accounts for voluntary turnover (Aryee, Chay & Chew, 1994). "The more an individual's expectations are met on the job, the greater his satisfaction" (Porter and Steers 1973, p. 169). Research (Aryee, Chay, & Chew, 1994; Aryee & Tan, 1992) consistently finds a significant correlation between job satisfaction and job or career commitment. In general, an employee's decision to participate or withdraw from an organization can be looked upon as a process of balancing received or potential rewards with desired expectations. ". . . expectancy theory predicts that individuals who meet some level of satisfactoriness will subsequently be rewarded for possessing these characteristics. In other words, those who fit will flourish" (Bretz & Judge, 1994, pp. 34). That is to say, when a new faculty member's expectations are met, they are more likely to remain and contribute to the institution.

Since 102 of the more than 3,500 colleges and universities produce 80% of the doctorate holders, new faculty often arrive on campus having been socialized at a research university. Yet, most start their teaching careers at much different colleges. "In fact, fewer than 10 percent of Ph.Ds end up in other research universities" (Gaff & Lambert, 1996, p. 38). The majority of these new faculty members will end up at liberal arts colleges, teaching universities, or community colleges. "A serious problem may result when a new faculty member oriented toward a disciplinary culture of research is hired at a teaching-oriented institution" (Tierney & Rhoads, 1994, p. 34).

Moreover, professors at research universities are unlikely to be able to prepare them for these environments because they have not experienced them themselves. Gaff and Lambert (1996) note that the tasks required of new faculty, but seldom taught at research universities, include designing new courses, teaching diverse students, advising, contributing to institutional initiatives, and serving on faculty committees. Meyers, Reid, and Quina (1998) found that many new faculty report that in graduate school they learned virtually nothing about effective teaching, the norms of academia, or being a productive faculty member.

The study reported here was conducted at a comprehensive state-supported university located in the Northeast near a large metropolitan area. Although the institution defines its mission primarily in terms of teaching, its long-time president had publicly stated his goal was to create a research university. However, difficult economic times have continually thwarted this ambition. The university is viewed by the public as primarily providing masters-level professional degree programs and baccalaureate pre-professional degree programs.

The definition of "new faculty" is somewhat ambiguous (Finkelstein & LeCelle-Peterson, 1992), so the researcher first developed an operational definition of new faculty. Since Boice (1992) reports that after three years faculty object to the label "new faculty", the sample for this study was drawn from individuals hired within the past three years. Because even within this subset of faculty there is variation in terms of prior experience, the researcher adopted Boice's (1992) classification. New faculty were grouped into three classifications. Inexperienced faculty were those who had no previous full-time faculty appointment at a college or university. Experienced faculty were those

who had held a full-time faculty position at another college or university. Returning faculty were individuals who had worked in a non-educational setting before changing careers.

After securing the Institutional Research Review Board approval, the researcher obtained a list of all full-time faculty hired in the last three years. Fourteen individuals were randomly selected to be interviewed. The researcher contacted the respondents by telephone and asked them to participate. All fourteen originally selected agreed to be interviewed.

The researcher used a semi-structured interview procedure working from a set of core questions developed from a review of the relevant literature. Although respondents were guaranteed confidentiality, a few were initially suspicious about the researcher's motives and what might get back to administrators. Nonetheless, all appeared to be open and frank with the interviewer. Several indicated that they found the opportunity to talk about their experiences as new faculty members quite beneficial and sought reassurance that their own experiences were not all that different from other new faculty.

One of the problems faced by new faculty is a sense of isolation. This sense of isolation often makes the faculty members think that the frustrations they are experiencing are unique to them. Often they blame something about themselves or a perceived weakness on their part. For example, one faculty member frustrated over her inability to find sufficient time for scholarship lamented her poor time management skills. When told that lack of time for scholarship was a common concern of most of the new faculty interviewed, she realized that she was not a poor manager of her time.

A unique circumstance that may have affected some of the respondents of this study was a recent change in teaching load. The retiring president of the university had increased the teaching load from 6 to 8 courses per academic year for undergraduate tenured faculty and from 6 to 7 courses per academic year for untenured and graduate faculty. Another circumstance possibly affecting this study was that the researcher was himself a new faculty at the institution. The researcher has since accepted another teaching position.

Similar to other studies of new faculty (Boice, 1991; Menges, 1996; Sorcinelli, 1988; Turner & Boice, 1989; van der Bogert, 1991), faculty from all three categories reported surprise and some resentment at the amount of time spent preparing for class. New faculty interviewed were nearly in total agreement that preparation for class "takes an incredible amount of time" (2nd year experienced). After stating that preparation took at least 50 hours a week, one respondent added "I barely have enough time" (1st year inexperienced). Several mentioned that preparation for teaching consumed not only weekdays but also evenings and weekends. A few expressed a sense of frustration or bitterness. "I sometimes add it up. I spend 60-70 hours a week working. That puts me at the pay level of a K-Mart worker. That is scary. I didn't expect it" (1st year returning).

Although researchers have found that self-estimates of the amount of time may be somewhat exaggerated (Turner & Boice, 1989), the findings of this study are typical of those of other researchers. Mager and Myers (1983) found that 74% of the new faculty they studied report working more than 50 hours a week, and 38% claimed to work more than 60 hours a week. Turner and Boice (1989) estimate the average new faculty member worked 53 hours per week, and Finkelstein & LeCelle-Peterson (1992) claim that new

faculty work at least 48 hours a week. A 40+-hour workweek is not out of line with that of even senior professors. The salient difference, however, is that new faculty devote considerably larger proportions of their working hours to preparation for teaching.

Although the respondents felt prepared for class, this enthusiasm often appeared half-hearted. Many used qualifying phrases such as "most times". A typical respondent expressed it this way:

> I come to class prepared, but if you mean as prepared as I want to be--no....I am having to use low-grade technology because I have no time. I need to have repeat preparations to have time. The way it is going I don't see that happening. (1st year returning).

Responses would indicate that for new faculty to feel sufficiently prepared for most class sessions it takes all their energy. They believe that they need to spend most of their working hours preparing, and some resent the need to set aside other responsibilities, such as family. "I am disappointed that I am so busy. Seems like I work all the time...My wife expects me to help with the house and I want to spend time with her. I work late at night" (1st year inexperienced).

Of fourteen respondents, six believed that they understood the requirements to gain tenure. Faculty who felt they understood the requirements to gain tenure usually credited their department chair and dean with clarifying the requirements. Boice (Fall 1994) has argued that new faculty who excel tend to have exemplary chairpersons who proactively work with and mentor new faculty. Turner and Boice (1989) note that "new faculty who judged their chairs as incompetent and/or unsupportive were invariably the

most unhappy and demoralized individuals in the sample" (p. 55). It would appear that clear communication between chairs and new faculty is a key to retention of new faculty.

When attempting to articulate their understanding of the tenure requirements, this minority of new faculty were usually quite precise regarding their understanding that scholarship was required, but either did not mention or were vague regarding the teaching and service requirements. For example one new faculty member said "I have to have decent student evaluation results. . . . The Dean said I should do two papers/presentations a year. My service should be broader, campus wide" (2nd year returning).

Of fourteen respondents, eight felt that the requirements for gaining tenure were unclear. A typical response was

> I sort of do but it is fuzzy. They are precise and they are not. Too many parts are fuzzy...can be interpreted by what people have in their minds. You gain tenure "partly by not making waves, being a good teacher certainly, doing a lot things administrators want done, modest scholarship (2nd year experienced).

This notion that the requirements were a moving target came up in other interviews and crossed all three categories of new faculty. "No--I don't feel that anyone else does either. It is so situational. It depends on the person" (2nd year returning). "Absolutely not, because they are always shifting" (1st year inexperienced). One respondent stated that she had "no precise idea of quantifiable criteria, but a general feeling" (1st year returning); however, she seemed willing to settle for a feeling that if no one said differently, she was doing a good job.

A few new faculty had been given specific requirements for scholarship; however, these varied widely across departments. In some departments the expectation was 1

article per year published in a refereed journal, in others it was 2. In one department, the respondent was told he would "need 3 articles in the top journals of [his] field" in five years (1st year inexperienced). In another department, the respondent was told he would need 6 articles in refereed journals with at least 1 data driven before tenure review. In another department, a senior colleague was quoted saying "the dean counts pages" (1st year experienced).

When the new faculty did mention teaching requirements, they spoke of student evaluation scores only. Some chairpersons had set a range of acceptable mean scores for global items appearing on the student evaluation forms. However, there was no mention of any other means for assessing the effectiveness of a new faculty member's teaching.

Service requirements seem to trouble new faculty. "Service is kind of on the edge. We are not given any parameters for service. What kind of service would be acceptable?" (1st year returning). Mostly, there was a sense that there was not enough time for much service. A few new faculty seemed confused or even angry regarding service requirements. "I expected the emphasis on teaching. I had no idea of the amount of time that service to the college would consume. The amount of time was a shocker. Advisement alone takes a huge amount of time. There is a lot to learn" (2nd year returning). Several new faculty stated that during the interview process they had been told that service would not be very important during their first years on campus. "I was told that I would not have to do service [at first] but was given service. I would be considered a slacker if didn't." (1st year returning). Some new faculty expressed the belief that tenured faculty members did not carry their load forcing them to pick up more service

than they could handle. They felt powerless to complain for fear of retaliation at tenure review time.

Many studies (Boice, 1992; Reynolds, 1992; Sorcinelli, 1988; Whitt, 1991) of new faculty assimilation into the culture of their institutions found new faculty persistently complained about the lack of support from senior colleagues. Turner and Boice (1989) even argued that "relationships with colleagues were the most salient and pervasive source of dissatisfaction among all subsamples of new faculty" (p. 55). However, in this study nearly all respondents expressed high levels of comfort with colleagues. Only two expressed some discomfort. "Some yes, some no. Other new members and I get together. Others are tenured. They just aren't around. . . . I thought I'd be part of a community of thinkers, sharing reactions to articles. I haven't seen it happen. I have strong relation with chair. Talk quite a lot. Most others are just not around" (2nd year inexperienced). Another called the lack of support from colleagues "a real problem...being the junior member I don't know how to speak out about it. I have been told to keep my mouth shout" (1st year returning).

It is difficult to determine why the level of collegiality felt by the respondents in this study is higher than that found by other researchers. Nonetheless, this is a good sign for the campus studied. Good relationships with colleagues appears to be an important predictor of success for new faculty. "As new faculty reflect on their experience, they agree on one thing: no matter how much they value their autonomy as professors, they still rely most on colleagues for success as teachers, as productive researchers, and as contented professionals" (Boice, 1992, p. 19).

Of 15 respondents to a question about scholarship productivity, only 2 felt they were finding sufficient time for research activities. Many responded in absolutes such as "absolutely not" or "definitely not". There was an overwhelming sense of despair among the majority of respondents. "No. I barely have time to pay my bills. My time is totally taken up with preparing, teaching, and grading" (1st year returning). "I wish I didn't have this feeling that I am just a very bad manager of time. I just do what I have to do. I am really exhausted in the evening. I don't mind teaching. I actually like teaching. It's just that four courses is too much" (1st year inexperienced). "No, not during the school year. I have worked on one article from my dissertation with a colleague from my school, but there is almost no time" (1st year inexperienced). Nor did it make a difference if the respondent was an experienced faculty member. One respondent with five years' teaching experience elsewhere stated, "probably you can find it, but you take away from other things....50 to 60 hr work week...5 nights a week" (2nd year experienced faculty).

Typical of the findings of Boice (1992), most new faculty "perceived pressures were far greater for teaching than for publishing; activities that could wait were put aside until new faculty had time and energy left over from teaching" (p. 56). Although most respondents in this study seemed too overwhelmed to think about future scholarly endeavors, a few expressed the belief that things would improve after they had gotten past preparing and teaching new courses. "Hopefully that will be better next year....summer will be good...but during the year there has been no time. I hope to write 2 articles during the summer" (1st year inexperienced faculty). "100% of my time is teaching. In the summer I hope to do research" (1st year returning). However, an experienced faculty member seemed to realize that finding sufficient time for scholarship

will always be difficult. When asked if there was sufficient time for scholarship an experienced faculty member with 8.5 years experience at a Carnegie classification Research I University replied "No--no doubt about that. I have started 2 projects since I came here [3 years ago] and haven't finished either" (3rd year experienced).

The researchers asked a series of questions designed to get at how new faculty members allocate their time, how this matches their desires to allocate their time, their perceptions of how their departmental colleagues expect them to allocate their time, how the way they allocate their time matched their expectations before accepting the position, and what if any considerations the department gave them in their first years. Several interesting themes emerged.

When asked how they do allocate their time among teaching, research, and service, many new faculty responded that preparation for teaching took all or nearly all of their working hours. "A hundred percent of my time is on teaching. In the summer I hope to do my research" (1st year returning). "I have a commitment to teaching. I've done some service . . . but no scholarship" (2nd year returning). "Mostly I teach--teaching is 90%, research 5%, and scholarship 5%" (1st year inexperienced). Perhaps the most astounding finding was that many stated that they didn't consciously plan the use of their time. "I don't do it consciously, I feel like a bad manager. Day-to-day, I do what I have to do." (1st year inexperienced). "Time is allocated on the basis of needs" (1st year returning). Even some with prior full-time college teaching experience seemed unable to set priorities. "Which ever is most pressing is what gets taken care of. Most of the time, teaching is most pressing. . . . In most cases, scholarship is not a priority. It is whichever bush is burning" (3rd year experienced). The ability to manage both teaching and

scholarship may ultimately be the determinate of success for new faculty. Boice (1992) found that a critical difference oetween new faculty whom he calls "quick starters" and less successful new faculty was the ability to balance scholarship and teaching. It would, therefore, seem that new faculty need some guidance on how to handle multiple professional activities if the college truly wishes them to be successful.

When asked how they would prefer to allocate their time between teaching, research, and service, the respondents indicated that in the best of all possible worlds service would be a low priority. However, when it came to expressing a preference for teaching or scholarship, the respondents were far from unanimous. Only three indicated that they would prefer to spend a majority of their time on teaching activities, and even they felt scholarship was important. A typical respondent said "I took this job so I could be a teacher. I would like to push things to research/scholarship some just because I would have more stuff to show my students"(1st year inexperienced). Another respondent acknowledged the importance of scholarship in the tenure decision when he replied "I like teaching....I know I need to get published to get tenure" (1st year inexperienced).

The majority of the respondents would prefer to spend more time on scholarship than teaching. "I'd like more time for research" (1st year experienced). [This was from a faculty member who has a grant that buys her out of two courses an academic year]. "I wish I had more time for scholarship. That's why I made the switch" (1st year returning). Another replied that he would prefer to allocate his time "30% to teaching, 40% to research, and 30% to service. The role of a faculty member is not just to teach" (1st year inexperienced).

Interestingly of those who were asked how they thought their departmental colleagues would prefer to see them allocate their time, many indicated a perceived mismatch between their preferences and their colleagues' preferences for them. In most cases, the new faculty believed that their colleagues expected more scholarship than they had time to produce. "They would like me to be more productive. The specific number is in debate now. I need three articles to get tenure" (1st year inexperienced).

When asked how their experiences at the college matched their expectations upon taking the position, many faculty interviewed expressed shock at the overall workload. "Workload is even more than I thought it would be---never ends. I expected a high workload but . . ." (1st year inexperienced). Some new faculty were more cynical or disillusioned. One cynic replied "The weather matched" (1st year inexperienced). Another new faculty member expressed disillusionment over the quality of the students. "I was not prepared for teaching undergraduate courses, it's like teaching high school. . . . Students need counseling" (1st year returning).

Typical of the findings of other studies (Boice, 1991) of new faculty, the respondents were nearly unanimous in their distrust of student evaluations. Only one of the 16 respondents felt that they were useful in and of themselves. This new faculty member said: "Everything I have is below 2. I'm in good shape" (1st year inexperienced). [At the institution studied, student evaluations are calculated on a 0 to 5 point Likert scale with 0 being excellent. Lower scores are therefore, desirable]. This new faculty member is clearly atypical. Although several respondents indicated that they found student evaluations somewhat useful, they also expressed considerable doubt regarding their validity and usefulness. The most common complaint centered on the possible

vindictiveness of students. "I am leery of them. Students could get out of the wrong side of the bed" (1st year inexperienced). "We should be evaluated but a teacher has no control over student agendas. If a student is mean-spirited, he can have a field day" (2nd year returning). "If that is all...it is not enough...gives some students too much power" (2nd year experienced).

Some new faculty expressed the concern that having high standards could result in poor student evaluation scores. "The student assessment puts you in a precarious position. If you are demanding, the students may score you lower" (1st year returning). "The students rate you low because you make them work hard" (1st year inexperienced). New faculty expressed a good deal of distrust in the ability of students to tell faculty anything useful about their teaching. "I don't think much of student evaluations in general. I think in upper division courses they have some value...Students don't know what they need to know" (1st year returning). "I am always a little leery of the bubble ones...I think it is hard to quantify teaching, especially in the humanities. When I have the chance to make my own I make them narrative form" (1st year inexperienced).

Another prevalent concern centered on the utilitarian value of student evaluation. Some new faculty believed that they simply didn't provide sufficient information to assist in the improvement of teaching. "Reasonably useful . . . 1st set reasonably good . . . still have to guess at what students mean" (1st year inexperienced). "It is a limited picture of what goes on. The department has its own instrument, which is more open-ended and provides more detailed information" (1st year inexperienced). Many expressed the need to temper student evaluation results with some form of peer evaluation. "I think peer reviews are much more useful" (3rd year experienced). "A peer review system would give

balance. At my other school it helped me a lot" (1st year experienced). Many also expressed the belief that open-ended questions would provide more useful information.

The final interview question asked new faculty to relate the greatest disappointment upon taking the position. The response to this interview question seemed influenced by some major conflicts occurring on campus. The campus studied is represented by a collective bargaining agent and is experiencing some labor-management conflicts. First, management and the union have not been able to come to a new agreement in the two years since the previous contract expired. Second, as already mentioned the president increased teaching load from 6 courses per academic year to 8 courses per academic year for tenured undergraduate faculty and 7 courses per year for untenured or graduate faculty. However during the course of these interviews, the investigators learned that chairpersons did not always follow these guidelines for new faculty. Some new faculty were given an 8 course load, while others were given a 6 course load. Most, however, were given a 7 course load. When inconsistency did occur, it was sometimes within the same department. Therefore, it is not surprising that when asked to name their greatest disappointment, many faculty felt it was the union and departmental politics.

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